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WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

## Overview

**M**ental health problems are common in society, with women being particularly vulnerable to certain conditions. The reasons for this include genetics, hormones, anatomy, neurology and psychosocial structures (Otten et al., 2021). The differences in mental health rates will also vary depending on the country, diagnostic criteria of mental health conditions and availability of support services in each respective nation. Societal norms and expectations also shape the way that people are treated by others, which can impact women's mental health – and there are many common mental health conditions which particularly affect women.

### Common mental health problems among women include...

- Depression
- Mood Disorders (Bipolar and Depressive Disorders)
- Anxiety
- Self-harm
- Suicide
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Although everyone will experience poor mental health at some point in their lives, several societal factors may contribute to poor mental health among women – these include:

- Unemployment or changes in work
- Lack of social support
- Interpersonal issues
- Stress
- Loneliness

**1 in 3 women will have a diagnosis of a mental disorder in any given year...**

## Menopause & Mental Health

Menopause is caused by hormonal changes which occur as a woman gets older – typically occurring between the ages of 44 and 55 (Cronin et al., 2020). The menopausal transition, known as the perimenopause stage, is marked by various physical and psychological changes; of which this can have an effect on a woman's mental health – placing women at a greater risk of developing poor mental health (Gordon et al., 2022). Mental disorders can also greatly affect women's health as they approach menopause and for those who already had mental health symptoms, menopause can exacerbate these conditions.

### Suicide

The onset age of the menopausal stage has been associated with increased suicide rates. Among women, death by suicide is most common among those in the 45-49 age demographic, with the second highest rate in females being between the ages of 50-54 years (Kulkarni, 2018).

### Perimenopausal Depression

A common mental health problem among women approaching menopause is perimenopausal depression, which has a broad



range of symptoms that can impact mental health. Symptom type and severity will range and not all women who enter menopause will experience perimenopausal depression or another mental disorder - although this is still common, nonetheless.

**Symptoms of perimenopausal depression include:**

- Sleep disturbance
- Low energy
- Irritability
- Reduced self-esteem
- Anxiety
- Issues with memory and concentration
- Weight gain
- A decrease in sexual interest
- Paranoia

## Suicide amongst women is most common for those in the menopausal age range...



## Common Mental Health Conditions in Women - Statistics

- Approximately **1 in 3** women will have a diagnosis of a mental disorder in any given year (Otten et al., 2021).

**Major depression**

- Major depression affects **1 in 20** women (5.5%) (Albert, 2015) – which is twice as common than it is in men (Sekhon, & Gupta, 2021).

**Anxiety disorders**

- Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) affects more than **1 in 20** women (6%) than men (3%) (Hantsoo, & Epperson, 2017).
- Social anxiety disorder affects women (5%-15%) more than men (4%-11%) (Hantsoo, & Epperson, 2017).
- Specific phobias affect twice as many women (12%-27%) than men (6%-12%) (Hantsoo, & Epperson, 2017).

**Self-harm**

- Approximately **1 in 4** women ages 16-24 (25.7%) engage in self-harm, compared to 1 in 10 men (NICE, 2020).

**Post-traumatic stress disorder/PTSD**

- PTSD affects approximately **1 in 10** women (10%-12%), compared to **1 in 20** men (5%-6%) (Olf, 2017).

**Bipolar disorder**

- Bipolar disorder has been found to be slightly more common in women than men – affecting 0.5% of women and 0.4% of men (Parial, 2015).

**Obsessive compulsive disorder/OCD**

- Postpartum females are twice as likely to develop OCD as females in the general population (Brock, & Hany, 2022).

## How can Women Manage their Mental Health?

- **Exercise & physical activity:** Engaging in physical activity/exercise has been found to be an effective strategy for managing one's mental health. Exercise improves self-esteem and overall cognitive function, which subsequently reduces the negative effects of conditions such as anxiety, which is a common condition among women.



- **Balanced diet:** Eating enough micronutrients and minerals can optimize cognitive function, which can help with the management of mental health among women. Try to consume enough fruits and/or vegetables and enough Omega-3 fatty acids to optimal brain function.

- **Have a good social support network:** The availability of social support, such as having a conversation with a close friend or family member can be effective for supporting women's mental health.

- **Speak to a mental health professional:** In some cases, it may be important to speak with a qualified mental health professional. You may want to speak to somebody such as a clinical psychologist, who can assess, diagnose and treat mental health conditions. Alternatively, you can speak to a counsellor, with whom you can discuss emotional or mental health issues and they can help you to better understand these.

## Women's Mental Health Support Services – Useful Contacts & Websites

- **Agenda – Alliance for Women and Girls at Risk**  
<https://weareagenda.org/peer-support-programme>
- **Age UK**  
[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)
- **British Menopause Society**  
<https://thebms.org.uk>
- **Just for Women**  
<https://justforwomen.org.uk>
- **The Menopause Charity**  
[www.themenopausecharity.org](http://www.themenopausecharity.org)
- **Wellbeing of Women**  
[www.wellbeingofwomen.org.uk](http://www.wellbeingofwomen.org.uk)
- **Wish**  
[www.womenatwish.org.uk](http://www.womenatwish.org.uk)
- **Women's Aid – Until Women and Children are Safe**  
[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)



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If you would like more tips about living with  
mental illness then please visit our website:  
[www.shawmind.org](http://www.shawmind.org)



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